DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 175 007 CS 205 042

AUTHOR Monkowski, Paul G.; Kelley, Marie E.
TITLE The Lincoln Writing Laboratory: A Systems-Based Model for Individual Instruction.
PUB DATE Mar 79
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (34th, Detroit, Michigan, March 3-7, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Achievement Gains; *Composition (Literary); Educational Research; *Individualized Instruction; *Learning Laboratories; *Program Evaluation; Secondary Education; Systems Approach; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

An individualized program for teaching writing skills was initiated for high school students in a writing laboratory program. The major goal was to develop a systematic, individualized approach for teaching 300 specific writing skills. Major characteristics of the program included evaluation of student writing to diagnose and prescribe instruction, demonstration of mastery of skills in actual writing, and provision for monitoring retention of writing skills. Analysis of student performance on the STEP (Sequential Tests of Educational Progress) writing test indicated that writing laboratory students made significantly greater gains from pretest to posttest and that the rate of growth was significantly greater than that of control students, suggesting that specific instruction in writing should produce a marked effect on student achievement across time. (Author/TJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Paul G. Monkowski
Marie E. Kelley

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED175007

The Lincoln Writing Laboratory: A Systems-Based Model for Individual Instruction

PAUL G. MONKOWSKI
Nebraska Educational Service Unit 18

MARIE E. KELLEY
Lincoln Nebraska Public Schools

Background and Objectives

The Writing Laboratory Project, an individualized program for teaching writing skills supported with ESEA Title III and Title IV funds, was initiated by the staff of the Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1975. The major goal of the project was to develop a systematic, individualized approach for teaching 300 specific writing skills to high school students. The program, centered on 300 learning packages which are carefully sequenced lesson plans, directs students to appropriate learning activities in hundreds of commercial texts and audiovisual materials. During three developmental years, the project staff (1) created, tested and refined the learning packages, and (2) developed processes and supporting materials to aid students and teachers in the use of the learning system.

Major characteristics of the Writing Laboratory program include (1) evaluation of student writing to diagnose and prescribe instruction, (2) demonstration of mastery of all skills in actual writing and (3) provision for monitoring retention of writing skills. The flexibility of the system allows for its use with students of all ability levels as an elective course in English, as a referral center for students from all subject areas, and as a supplement for independent study projects. Because learning and practice materials are organized for independent use by students and because peer evaluation is used extensively, teachers spend much of their time conferring with individual students about their progress and their unique writing problems.

In 1977, the Writing Laboratory Project was extended from the two pilot schools, one public and one parochial, to the three remaining high schools in Lincoln, Nebraska. In 1978, the program was validated for use within the state of Nebraska and approved as an ESEA Title IV demonstration project.

The purpose of this study was to determine (a) the relative effect of the Writing Laboratory instruction and (b) the effect of refinement of project instructional materials on student writing performance.

Perspective and Theoretical Framework

Research in methods of teaching written composition, in spite of the fact that it spans many decades, suggests more implications for how not to teach writing than for building successful instructional programs. Numerous studies of the effects of instrucion in grammar on student writing performance, beginning with Hoyt[1] in 1906 and culminating

---

Presented at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Detroit, Michigan, 1979.

CS205042

with Elley[2] in 1976, have confirmed the ineffectiveness of formal grammar study. Several studies of the effects of frequency of writing on performance suggest that increasing the number of opportunities for writing fails to produce gains in writing skills; in fact, evidence from the Buxton[3] (1958) and McColly[4] (1963) studies suggests that decreasing the amount of writing and improving instruction will produce improvement in writing skills. The IEA studies in foreign languages, science and literature[5] indicated that opportunity to learn was the most important variable affecting student performance, and the Bamberg[6] study (1975) showed that more successful writers in freshmen English classes at UCLA had enrolled in more high school English courses and had tended to include more writing skills courses in their programs than did less successful writers.

Because the inception of the Writing Laboratory Project coincided with a crest of the "back to the basics" wave, the project staff saw a need for the development of a program which would help teachers focus on teaching writing rather than reverting to practices which research has indicated untenable. Thus, the program which resulted is focused upon identifying specific needs of individual students and providing them the opportunity to develop skills related to their needs.

Data Source

Students at the target school who registered for the course were administered the Writing subtest of the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress at the beginning of their semester of enrollment and before exiting from the program. In addition, randomly selected control students from classes in which writing was integrated with instruction in other aspects of English were also administered the test according to the same schedule. Students were matched on IQ to control for general mental ability.

Method:

To determine the relative effect of Writing Laboratory instruction and the effects of materials refinement on student performance over time, scores were analyzed by multivariate procedures for repeated measures.

The design is diagramatically represented as follows:

Year 1 (Spring 76)			Year 2 (Fall 76)		
Jan. 76		May 76	Sept. 76	Jan. 77	May 77
O_1	X	O_2			
O_3		O_4			
			O_5	X O_6	
			O_7	O_8	
				O_9 X	O_{10}

Arbitrary contrasts were set up to test the difference between:

(a) Writing Laboratory and control students.

(b) Writing Laboratory students of the first Spring semester and Writing Laboratory students of the second Spring semester.

(c) Writing Laboratory students of the Spring semesters and Writing Laboratory students of the Fall semesters.

(d) First year control students and Second year control students.

Each contrast was orthogonal to every other contrast.

Results:

The findings of the analyses of student scores across time for the arbitrary contrasts are summarized below.

TABLE

Contrast	Variable	Square	F	P
Experimental vs. Control (N=66) (N=53)	Main effect	5482.70	16.61	< .05
	Time	492.01	8.39	< .05
Fall vs. Spring (N=24) (N=42)	Main effect	362.04	1.10	NS
	Time	1.51	0.03	NS
Spring '76 vs. Spring '77 (N=24) (N=16)	Main effect	419.40	1.27	NS
	Time	374.04	6.38	< .05
Control '76 vs. Control '77 (N=26) (N=27)	Main effect	6510.90	19.72	<.05
	Time	116.07	1.98	NS

Results indicated that the Writing Laboratory students not only made significantly greater gains from pretest to posttest when compared to control students, (main effect) but the rate of growth of students in the program was significantly greater than the rate of growth of control students (time effect). The data also revealed that the rate of growth of students who participated in the program increased each semester with the Spring 1977 growth rate being significantly higher than the Spring 1976 growth rate (Spring vs. Spring contrast).

Educational Significance

English curriculum surveys conducted by Squire and Applebee[7] (1968) and Hillocks[8] (1972) reveal a lack of emphasis on composition with the high school English program. Squire and Applebee found that students spent approximately 17% of their time in comprehensive English classes on composition activities. Hillocks found that most composition instruction took place in composition-related elective courses and that these constituted 15% of English course offerings.

The data from the present study showed that students involved in the Writing Laboratory program, which focused directly on teaching of writing skills, grew in writing performance, whereas students in an English course in which writing instruction was integrated with instruction on other areas of English did not grow in writing performance. Thus, the trend toward more specific writing courses indicated in the Hillocks study may not be bad, if provisions are made for all students to be exposed to this kind of writing instruction.

Furthermore, the data show that as the project materials and procedures were refined and expanded with input from teachers and students using the program, student gains in writing performance increased. An implication from this finding, which should be further examined, is that more programs which organize teaching resources and practice activities into sequences which can be easily used by teachers and students should be developed. This would allow teachers time to focus on the unique needs of individual students and evaluation of student progress rather than spending time reorganizing lesson plans and correcting numerous practice activities.

References

1. Franklin S. Hoyt, The place of grammar in the elementary curriculum, Teacher's College Record, 1906, 7, 467-498.

2. W. B. Elley, et. al., "The Role of Grammar in a Secondary School English Curriculum," Research in the Teaching of English. 10 (Spring, 1976), 5-21.

3. Earl W. Buxton, "An Experiment to Test the Effects of Writing Frequency and Guided Practice upon Students' Skill in Written Expression," Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1958.

4. William McColly, Comparative Effectiveness of Composition Skills Learning Activities in the Secondary School. United States Office of Education Cooperative Research Project No. 1528. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1963.

5. International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, Stockholm, Sweden, 1973-1976, ERIC (ED102 169 - ED102 194).

6. Betty Bamberg, "Composition Instruction Does Make a Difference: A Comparison of the High School Preparation of College Freshmen in Regular and Remedial English Classes," Research in the Teaching of English. 12 (February, 1978), 47-59.

7. James Squire and Roger K. Applebee, High School English Instruction Today, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968.

8. George Hillocks, Jr., Alternatives in English: A Critical Appraisal of Elective Programs, National Council of Teachers of English and ERIC/RCS, 1972.

The Lincoln Writing Laboratory: A Systems-Based Model for Individual Instruction

PAUL G. MONKOWSKI
Nebraska Educational Service Unit 18

MARIE E. KELLEY
Lincoln Nebraska Public Schools

This study describes the development, implementation, and evaluation of an individualized program for teaching writing skills to high school students. Major characteristics of the program incluae evaluation of student writing to diagnose and prescribe instruction, demonstration of mastery of skills in actual writing, and provision for monitoring retention of writing skills. Analysis of student performance on the STEP-Writing indicated that Writing Laboratory students made significantly greater gains from pretest to posttest and the rate of growth was significantly greater than control students suggesting that specific instruction in writing should produce a marked effect on student achievement across time.